Amendments to the Specification

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 6, line 14, with the following rewritten paragraph:

-- Referring to Fig. 1, a system 10 for establishing vascular access according to the principles of the present invention comprises a radially expandable sleeve 12, a dilator 14, and a guidewire 16. The radially expandable sleeve comprises a radially expandable tubular body having a proximal end, a distal end, and an axial lumen extending from the proximal end to the distal end. Usually, a handle 20 is provided at the proximal end of the body so that the sleeve can be manually held during use, e.g., tension can be applied on the handle as the dilator 14 is passed through the body of the sleeve as described in more detail below. The radially expandable sleeve 12 may have a compliant or elastic structure which permits expansion from an initial small diameter (radially collapsed) configuration to a larger diameter configuration which is caused by introduction of the dilation therethrough. Use of the compliant or elastic sleeve will require a separate component for maintaining the expanded diameter of the tissue tract, as described in more detail below. Alternatively, the radially expandable sleeve can have a plastic or other locking structure so that, once expanded, it will retain its larger diameter configuration without the need for using other supports, devices, or the like. ~~For example, as seen in FIG. 1, the locking structure may include a tether 15 which may be fixedly secured to the distal end of radially expandable sleeve 12 and extending axially through radially expandable sleeve 12. Accordingly, in use, following radial expansion of sleeve 12, tether 15 may be tightened and a proximal end of tether 15 secured to handle 20. In this manner, axial elongation and in turn radial constriction of sleeve 12 is prevented until the proximal end of tether 15 is released.~~ --